



Press Release



**Congressman John Conyers, Jr.
Michigan, 14th District**

**Ranking Member, U.S. House Judiciary Committee
Dean, Congressional Black Caucus**
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Rep. Conyers Says Gang Bill Fails To Curb Youth Violence Calls Republican Bill Bumper Sticker Politics

Representative John Conyers, Jr., Ranking Member on the House Judiciary Committee, delivered the following statement today during House consideration of H.R. 1279, the so called Gang Deterrence and Community Protection Act of 2005:

“If ever there was an issue where we should be able to identify the problem, study the data, and work together to craft a common sense response, it is youth violence. Unfortunately the bill before us – which authorizes trying more juveniles as adults and provides for more mandatory minimums and more death penalties – does none of those things, and will seriously harm our system of juvenile justice.

First, we know that trying children as adults and transferring them to adult jails does not work:

- The Department of Justice has concluded that youth transferred to adult court and tried as adults are more likely to: (a) commit a greater number of crimes upon release; (b) commit violent crimes upon release; and (c) commit crimes sooner upon release.
- A recent Miami Herald study concluded that since adult prisons are “crime schools”, sending a juvenile there increases by 35 percent the odds they will commit another offense within one year of release.
- Another study found that youth incarcerated in adult prisons are five times as likely to report being a victim of rape, twice as likely to be beaten by staff, 50% more likely to be assaulted with a weapon, and eight times more likely to commit suicide.

Second, we know that mandatory minimums distort the sentencing process and severely discriminate against minorities:

- The Judicial Conference of the United States and the U.S. Sentencing Commission have found that mandatory minimums “destroy honesty in sentencing by encouraging charge and fact plea bargains.”
- They also found that minorities were substantially more likely than whites under comparable circumstances to receive mandatory minimum sentences

Again, the legislation ignores these facts and creates numerous new mandatory minimums that will lead to greater disparities and further discriminate against people of color. At a time when we already have more than 2.1 million Americans in prison or jail, and nearly 10 percent of these individuals are serving life sentences, it is hard to see how more jail time for more youth can accomplish anything.

Third, we know that the death penalty system in this country is not only error prone, but biased against minorities:

- A University of Michigan study found that since 1973, 119 innocent people have been

released from death row.

- Another study found that more than two out of every three capital judgments were seriously flawed – an error rate of 68%.
- The United Nations’ Human Rights Commission found that “race, ethnic origin and economic status appear to be key determinants of who will, and who will not, receive a sentence of death” in the U.S.
- The real tragedy is that it didn’t have to be this way. We could have worked together across party lines to reduce juvenile crime through prevention and early intervention programs geared toward at-risk youth. We could have chosen to fund the juvenile crime bills we passed in earlier congresses, or the Innocence Protection Act we passed last year.

But the majority rejected the bipartisan approach, and instead opted for bumper sticker politics. This is the wrong bill, for the wrong problem at the wrong time. I urge a no vote.”

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